INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT
Fiscal Year 2011

This year the Information Technology (IT) Department again made measurable progress in the area of technology consolidation and standardization. The increasing demand for more technology and automation throughout the organization did not show any sign of slowing, especially wireless, mobile, and self-service technologies. The result was another increase in Department service levels, and additional devices and software systems needing to connect and communicate over the Town's technology infrastructure. The IT Department has identified consolidation and standardization as a critical element in ensuring that the Department responsibilities can continue to increase at a slower rate than annual operating expenses and staffing levels.

One significant project in FY 11 was the launching of a new web-based system we call Open Government to the MAX! Open Government to the MAX! is a simple automated system, integrated into the Town's website that provides citizens and professionals in Amherst unique tools to participate in government, communicate with each other and officials about local issues, and automatically stay informed.

Like many communities Amherst faced issues surrounding how to streamline board and committee meeting postings while staying true to the law, creating efficiencies and going (almost) paperless. The goal was to create a system to meet that need, and other similar needs surrounding community events, news, bid and job postings, public notices and more. Additionally, we wanted the system to be easily marketable to the Amherst community.

To say the Open Government to the MAX! system has been a huge success in Amherst would be a understatement. Boards, committees and departments use the system and citizens and professionals of Amherst have more than embraced the system with over a thousand voluntary notification subscriptions and a very positive and vocal following. As a welcomed byproduct. usage of all portions of the Town's website have also increased as a result of the popularity of the Open Government to the MAX! service.

Another large undertaking in FY 11 was the externalization of our Microsoft Exchange email and collaboration servers. After careful analysis and research the IT Department decided to move to a hosted environment for the Town's servers that handle email, calendars, contacts, task lists and more. Having these systems hosted will allow these communications systems to function even in a disaster scenario. Additionally the hosted environment will be more reliable, provide immediate savings to the Town as well as improvements in the security of the systems.

This year the IT Department spent a significant amount of time revamping the audio and video needs within meeting spaces. Demand for simple and easy to use built-in projectors and wall displays with sound in meeting spaces has continued to increase. Staff and public users of meeting rooms now enjoy easy connectivity and built-in computers within all of the meeting spaces within the Town Hall, Bangs Community Center, the Police Department and the DPW. Built-in computers, projectors and large wall displays not only increase efficiency of meetings but also make for more informed decision making by staff and officials.

The IT Department continued to make significant progress on our Public GIS Viewer which is one of the most advanced and sophisticated interactive web-based government GIS Viewers in Massachusetts. More connections were made to pertinent Amherst property data and refinements were made to how users interact with the viewers. This year reports run on the website indicated our public GIS Viewers are now the second most requested service on amherstma.gov. This year the IT Department rebranded the Public GIS Viewer and named it Amherst Maps. The IT Department is excited about the Amherst Maps goals set for next year which will include support for every browser on every device including tablets and smartphones.

This fiscal year the IT Department again completed well over 3,000 work orders. Work orders in the IT Department are a measurement for how busy we have been, and this year was one of the largest numbers of work orders ever completed by the IT Department. As more systems and devices require interconnectivity to the Town's technology infrastructure, more assistance will be needed from the IT Department in selecting, implementing, supporting and maintaining such systems.

In 2008 the IT Department implemented website functionality allowing users to simply pay bills online. This year over 10,000 bills and parking tickets were paid using this system. The IT Department this year implemented a system called Online Self Service. Prior to the Online Self Service system residents could pay bills online but could not see any billing detail, or billing history. This system has already proven very popular and plans are now underway to launch the next iteration of this system which will allow users to view and pay all bills, parking tickets, business licensees, permits or even animal licenses online through this single integrated system. Additionally, functionality has been built-in to the new system which will allow residents to opt-in for paperless billing which will significantly reduce costs and contribute to green operations.

In addition to the many projects completed this year, the IT Department worked diligently behind the scenes, maintaining, repairing, and updating the vast amount of current systems. With the ever-increasing amount of spam e-mail and the constant threat of viruses and hackers, software upgrades to computers, servers other technology systems become a daily necessity. The IT Department maintains several layers and types of specialized security hardware and software, lowering the risk of unauthorized network intrusion and viruses. The Department also maintains a variety of backup systems; both onsite and offsite, ensuring that in a disaster, the Town's information and systems would be safe.

The citizen expectation of a more open and digitally accessible government continues to increase. In the coming year, the IT Department will continue to maintain software and infrastructure standards, extend more information and tools to the Amherst community via the Town's websites, provide departments, boards and committees with the necessary technologies to perform primary functions even more efficiently, and leverage new technologies in ways which will serve Amherst for years to come.

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